

Questions Matter



by RONALD A. KUIPERS

A magazine headline caught my eye the other day. It read: "Did Christianity Cause the Crash?" It was on the cover of the December issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. The article, by Hanna Rosin, suggests that a relatively new and increasingly popular strain of Christianity, known as the 'prosperity gospel', had a big hand in fostering the mad financial risk-taking and intense material optimism that fuelled the recent worldwide economic meltdown, causing suffering to untold numbers of people.

I was readying myself for the approaching Christmas season as I read this article, and suddenly I was struck by a rather discouraging thought. In 1907, Walter Rauschenbusch published *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, a key text in what was known as the 'social gospel' movement. This version of Christianity stressed the centrality of the gospel's social teaching for authentic Christian faith, the way Jesus calls his followers to lead lives of love that seek justice for everyone here and now. "From the social gospel to the prosperity gospel in little over a 100 years," I thought to myself. "We've come a long way, baby."

Now, I don't think this is the only or even the correct story to tell about

that last 100 years of Christianity in the West, ultimately because I trust God's promise of a coming Kingdom of *shalom* that no distortion of the gospel can prevent and whose signs constantly surround us. All the same, this story can and is being told today, and it troubles me. According to the *Atlantic Monthly* article, the prosperity gospel movement claims tens of millions of adherents in the United States alone. It scares me to think that so many people have thrown their lives behind such a seriously distorted telling of the good news of God in Christ. It puts me in mind of Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

The passage in Matthew goes on to say that we will know these prophets by the fruit their message bears when put into practice. Telling good from bad cultural fruit calls for careful discernment, and this is why I think questions matter. We mustn't simply accept as Christian everything that goes by that name. We would not be showing love to those Christians tempted by this distorted gospel if we didn't question their interpretation of Scripture and draw the connections between that interpretation and the poisoned social and cultural fruit it bears. When I think of the mission of ICS, I think of a task like this. It's easy to lose sight of it when you are caught in the thicker of abstract academic work, but that work does not matter one whit if it does not help us, somewhere along the line, to discern what will bear good fruit rather than bad.

Do we ask questions at ICS? Do we even question the adequacy of our Christian faith, such as we find it expressed by us and by those around us? You bet. Because questions matter, and the life of faith suffers without them. ●

ICS: Joy in Faithfulness

by BOB
SWEETMAN

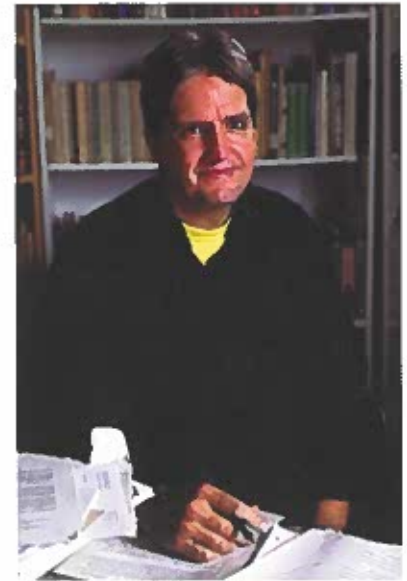
Faithfulness can be a joy or it can seem a grey obligation wrung from us half against our inclination. It has been my experience that joy has outshone obligation in the life of ICS. One doesn't have to look far to see examples of joyful faithfulness in the ICS community. I think of two Toronto ICS supporters who recently bought a broken-down, 150-year-old cottage and organized posses of volunteer and paid labourers to strip it down, provide its first real foundation, and rebuild it into a cozy and elegant urban home in a time of economic recession, with all that might mean for real estate values. They did this hoping to make a good profit and to give that profit to ICS as their response to its financial struggles.

It was a grand gesture, but only the most colourful example of a faithfulness that had already taken many forms in their lives over many years. There was nothing greyly half-hearted here, or performed against

preference. Lots of sweat and I am sure a measure of worry went into it; but, equally, plenty of energy, moments of joy, and the flicker of transcendence if one had but eyes to see. Their faithfulness is only a particularly vivid and creative example of the faithfulness of ICS's admirable support community over the years.

I remember a market gardener in the late 1970s and early 1980s who used to deliver to ICS massive sacks full of cauliflower, beets, broccoli, and leeks, and say by his generosity more than his words as he plunked down those sacks one by one in the hall by the elevator: "I don't have much money to give, but you people at ICS, I love and believe in your work. I know that you have to eat too, and I can sure help with that; here you go."

The joy expressed in the faithfulness of our supporters is a joy and faithfulness we who teach and study at ICS aspire to match. We do so not



half against our will, as an automatic response or a burden we are fated to bear, but rather as a bubbling over of the very best we have within us: our most creative and joyful theories about God's world, mentoring of a new generation of Christian scholars, organizing for institutional life and work, and attending to the community of support whose care mediates our God's welcoming invitation—"Let there be ICS". May this be the faithfulness we offer each other again in 2010 and for as many years as are in our shared Lord's pleasure. ●

Giving to ICS

There are many ways you can help sustain ICS into the future. Several such opportunities are described below.

PLANNED GIVING: WILLS AND BEQUESTS

A bequest is a gift in your will that you can direct to ICS. Your estate will be eligible for a tax receipt that can be used in the year of death and the preceding year. Gifts by will are an important source of support for ICS, because they enable our donors to make significant gifts that they may not have been able to make while living.

You reap several benefits by making a bequest:

You have the satisfaction of making a significant gift to ICS, an institution that you care about and supported during your lifetime.

You retain full control of the gift during your lifetime. A bequest is revocable and can be changed if your financial circumstances change.

Your bequest provides tax relief to your estate. Your estate may claim gifts in the year of death equal to 100 per cent of your net income in that year and in the preceding year.

IN MEMORIAM GIFT

An In Memoriam gift to ICS allows you to offer sympathy to those who have lost a loved one by contributing to a cause they care about. Your

donation will be acknowledged to the bereaved family without disclosing the amount.

LIVING GIFT

Some of your friends and colleagues already "have everything" and may invite you to a celebration where no gifts are requested. A Living Gift offers you the opportunity to honour your friend by making a donation to ICS in his or her name.

For more information about giving to ICS contact John O'Leary (joleary@icscanada.edu).

Read: Recent Work

IRELAND WEST : HEM OF THE SEA

My recent work comes from time spent last summer on the west coast of Ireland on the Dingle and Kerry peninsulas. The Great Famine haunts the landscape with absence: ruined cottages returning to gorse and bracken or morphing into new stone walls or garden paths. Emigration has marked the land with empty unused fields climbing a mountain; they seem impossibly high to our eyes used to flat fertile land. Even the shoulder of a highway would make a field in Ireland.

This land is the far edge of Europe where, as the Irish pubs declare, the next pub is Boston or New York. Drink now and drink deep! The sea slams into high cliffs, moulds sea caves, and makes tidal races where the water boils in opposing currents. The sun dies into the sea, trailing light and spilling over the mud flats of low tide.

My paintings engage with the land, the light, and the sea. They refer to the field lines: the small fields drawn by human lives against a rocky mountain. The fields are erased in wind and growth. The light picks up hidden lines and the signs of human work on the land. I pick up a brush and paint the edges, field against field, land against sea and sky. I pick up a brush and aim for the light. ●



Janet Read is an artist, poet, and musician who lives with her husband in Markham, Ontario. She is pursuing an MA in Aesthetic Philosophy at ICS, specializing in the phenomenology of the body and metaphor. See www.janet-read.com for more about Janet and her art.

Teaching the Teachers

by MICHAEL
DEMOOR

Graduate schools like ICS do a number of different things, and each of these can be ways of forming culture. One of the most direct ways in which they form culture, and hence one of the most direct ways in which a place like ICS can be a transformative agent for Christ in a secular culture, is by training those who will go on to teach young people in colleges and universities. I want to talk, as a teacher at The King's University College, about how ICS taught me to be a teacher.

ICS is not a "teacher's college" in the sense of providing instruction about effective transmission techniques, classroom management, and the like; in fact, it does virtually none of that (few graduate schools do). Furthermore, the typical pedagogical style I experienced at ICS — that is, a seminar discussing particular texts in depth — is not universally applicable to the undergraduate classroom (though I have

been known to use it). ICS doesn't teach teachers how to teach.

Rather, ICS teaches teachers how to *learn*, and, moreover, how to learn as Christians. It is this instruction that shaped me into the teacher that I am. Learning is a process that involves much more than the transmission of knowledge or facts; it requires *love* and *trust* along with a number of other virtues that can't be learned as rules or methods. Let me give an example.

Bob Sweetman's seminars on medieval philosophy gave me little guidance about how to transmit knowledge about medieval philosophy to undergraduates. Bob's pedagogy was "hands-off, let the students wrestle with the text until they can make sense of it." Bob did not lecture much, if at all, and did not often draw diagrams on the board. Rather, through dialogue and example, Bob imparted to me a love for the whole of the tradition of Christian thought, and a trust that however arcane,

dated, and even offensive that tradition could be, there is providential wisdom and guidance to be gained from (for example) long-dead monks. He showed how that wisdom could be unearthed, and he modelled the diligence and patience, rooted in love and trust, necessary to unearth it. He showed how one could look upon such a tradition as a gift of grace, both because and in spite of its human imperfection.

When I teach medieval thought to undergraduates at King's, I must of necessity lecture more than Bob did. There are basic concepts that I cannot presume the students have apprehended, and there is a stock of background knowledge that they must command in order to understand the material. But even in lecturing (which, I should say, is not all I do) I attempt to convey the love and trust – and the diligence and patience that follow from them – that make it possible to really *learn from* rather than merely *learn about* Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure.

Facts do not transform culture, and they don't transform lives. At best they are grist for mills they do not shape and whose ends they do not direct. I could have learned the facts about medieval thought anywhere. But when learning (and its "other half", teaching) is rooted in love and trust, then it has formative power in the lives of learners and teachers and in the culture they receive and reproduce. Learning in love and trust is learning in *faith*; only a graduate school that treats faith as the root of learning can produce teachers who know what it means to love what they teach and to trust that it will yield transformative wisdom. ●

Michael DeMoor is a doctoral candidate at ICS and Assistant Professor of Social Philosophy at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta.



"Jiyeh" by Stanford composer Jonathan Berger: a violin concerto that re-engages music and social ethics

The devastating effects of modern warfare, the suffering of its victims, and the enormous waste of ecological disaster are things, among many others, that leave most of us speechless. It is difficult enough to comprehend such things, to imagine a state of devastation or suffering true to the reality that inspires our reflection. But finding words to express such subjects often proves beyond our linguistic capabilities even though we might yearn to articulate our feelings of shame at human destructiveness. For good or ill, the tragic has its unique way of silencing human expression.

Artists who undertake to speak of such things through their art are no strangers to this dynamic of inexpressibility. Their struggle to find expressive means capable of doing their subjects justice is legendary in Western arts literature. Unlike us, artists bear in their act of creation the burden the rest of us might manage to avoid by silence. Their works expose to all who are willing to look or listen their own attempts to capture the complexity of human response to the devastating and the grievous: an awesome task.

When a work of art does manage to convey something of the depth of extraordinary loss and tragedy, it is a gift to us that its creator did not succumb to silence. What we receive from such art is a means for our own felt participation in matters that are of the utmost significance for humankind and which should elicit from us the greatest care and concern. For me, Jonathan Berger's violin concerto "Jiyeh" offers just such a gift. Written in 2007 in response to an air strike on the Lebanese town of Jiyeh that caused 30,000 tons of oil to spill into the Mediterranean Sea, the work attempts to express, in the words of its composer, "the destruction of the oil spill and the catastrophe of war."

Recorded in a series of satellite photos, the oil spill eventually stretched over one third of Lebanon's coastline and deposited oil as far away as Turkey. For the outer movements of his concerto, Berger used measurements taken from this satellite imagery to create auditory maps of the oil spill playable by an eighteen-piece string and percussion orchestra. Over the course of the three movements, the development of the contour of the oil spill is mapped and translated into an increasingly ornate violin solo that also draws tonal material from a prayer of forgiveness traditionally chanted on the Jewish Day of Atonement. For me, the effect is deeply moving as the solo violin is made to sing simultaneously of the literal contours of the disaster and

of our human longing for forgiveness. To hear "Jiyeh" is to enter into a penetrating moment of awareness of, and shared responsibility for, the grave realities of human conflict and destruction.

Jonathan Berger will talk about the composition of his concerto "Jiyeh" at the Institute's 2010 Art Talks lecture on April 10. At the same event, "Jiyeh" will be performed, along with other contemporary music engaging themes of war and Holocaust, by the New Music Ensemble of the Royal Conservatory of Music under the direction of Brian Current. ●

For more information see ad on page 8 or <http://www.tst.edu/about/events/songs-love-and-sorrow-re-engaging-social-ethics-music>.

by REBEKAH SMICK

In the summer of 2006, military conflict between Lebanon and Israel led to an oil spill along the coast of Lebanon. Between July 13 and 15, 2006, damage to the Jiyeh Power Station released thousands of tons of oil along the coast of Lebanon.



NASA image, public domain

Truth Matters

by RONNIE
SHUKER

Truth just ain't what it used to be. "Ever since there have been universities, we've always thought they were communities in pursuit of truth," said ICS professor of philosophy Lambert Zuidervaat. "Now we're not so sure of that."

Truth, it seems, has become a problem. But it's not just philosophers harrumphing about whether the fallen tree in the forest makes a thud, or theologians debating how many angels can disco on the head of a pin. The skeptics are no longer just academics.

"In western society, we've started to doubt some of the central values in our own culture and our own society," Zuidervaat said. "And whether those values be democracy, justice, or truth, we're not so sure they're as central to our lives and to our institutions as we once thought they were or once thought they should be."

Enter little-school ICS with big-

school ambitions: to make truth matter again, and to discuss which truth matters matter most.

ICS hosts a conference called "Truth Matters" next summer in Toronto, continuing a series of international conferences on faith and scholarship in the Reformed tradition held over the past three decades. It's co-sponsored by the Free University of Amsterdam, Calvin College in Michigan, and Dordt College in Iowa. Zuidervaat, who chairs the conference planning committee, has high hopes for next summer's meeting.

"Part of what we want to work on in this conference is to bring together people from various disciplines, and maybe even some from outside the academy, to try to think about truth in a way that brings people together again, talking about something they have in common rather than simply working away in our different cubbyholes," he said.

The idea of truth first budded for Zuidervaat when he came to ICS as a student in the 70s; a trained musician and a long-time lover of art, he wanted to pursue the relationship between truth and art in philosophy. He found a home at ICS. Many moons later, a student's wish became

a professor's work, blossoming into his 2004 book, *Artist Truth*.

Zuidervaat is now working on a more expansive and general notion of truth for his next book. His work has proven so contagious that acting president, Bob Sweetman, pushed the faculty to tackle the problem of truth together.

"It's an obvious choice for an institutional focus," he said. "What we try and do is look at those deep issues of scholarly understanding that are repeated in one discipline after another—and truth, of course, is one of those."

Last winter, ICS looked at current ideas of truth in its annual interdisciplinary seminar attended by all faculty and students; this winter another seminar is underway, exploring past ideas of truth from ancient times to the modern era. These studies will lay the groundwork for Truth Matters.

"The conference is a wonderful opportunity to take this very intense internal communal work and put it into a broader discussion," Sweetman said. ●

Ronnie Shuker is the communications coordinator for Truth Matters, and a doctoral student at ICS.



Truth Matters is an interdisciplinary conference that will examine the problem of truth in the western world. Participants will discuss why truth matters for our society and culture, and debate the issues concerning truth that most need our attention.

when August 18–20, 2010
where Victoria University at the University of Toronto
contact truthmatters@icscanada.edu
website www.icscanada.edu/truthmatters/

(Supported by a grant from the
Priscilla and Stanford Reid Trust)

Wade in the water, children

Our story opens. We encounter waters troubled by winds in a dark and formless deep. From such “Olthian” wild spaces, out of annihilating, uninhabitable love, comes the first act of hospitality: light. Then begins the articulation of boundaries, separating the waters from the waters, gathering the earthly waters into prescribed places, making dry land. Step by step we witness the craft and play of making a habitable world (Genesis 1, Proverbs 8:22-31).

Ever since, we creatures have harboured mixed feelings about water. Our bodies and our world are made of water. Water springing into the desert is our image of salvation (Isaiah 41:18). And yet these same waters overwhelm and scare us, threatening to undo creation (Genesis 6:1-3ff, Exodus 20:18-19).

God’s primordial waters live and move and breathe in creation, stirring things up and ending oppressive patterns of power. The Red Sea parts and a little band of escaping slaves

miraculously escape. The Pharaoh’s military might, hot on their trail, gets mired and drowns (Exodus 14:1-3ff).

We hear the words of U.S. slaves singing the words of the old spiritual: *Wade in the water. Wade in the water, children. Wade in the water. God’s gonna trouble the water.* With the ears of missionaries, do we hear the docile devotion of the newly converted? Or do we hear with the ears of organizers the call to the long journey toward freedom, with all its emotional and technical preparation? Wade in the water, children. When you hear the hounds come after you, get into the water so they lose the scent.

In the Hebrew priestly worldview, the Temple is the appointed mediator between God’s unapproachable holiness and human believers. Ezekiel’s vision in chapter 47 describes primordial waters moving through the Temple like a great spring. He is led eastward from the Temple. First the water is ankle-deep, then knee-deep, then up to the waist, and then a river too wide to cross. The meaning of this vision is explained: there

is a river from God that nourishes every living thing; it fills the sea with fish and feeds the trees. “Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail . . . because water for them flows from the sanctuary” (47:12).

Jesus is baptized in the primordial waters. He chooses fishermen for followers. He pulls abundance from the sea. He crosses stormy seas to move between the boundaries of Jew and Gentile regions. He troubles the waters for the man who wished to walk (John 5:2-9). He offers living water to the woman at the well (John 4:7-15). He is our guide when it comes to negotiating these wild waters, breaking into our created order, pressing for healing and justice. He says a word and the seas obey (Mark 4: 37-41, Psalm 65:7). We are more like Peter—desiring such powers, but uncertain on our feet.

So Jesus takes our hand. We wade in the waters of baptism, and we become a fountain. “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Rivers flow from our hearts to satisfy the thirsty, make rivers in the desert of greed and militarism, enrich the earth so it will make good food, and heal all whom the living waters touch.

Thus we come full circle. As the canon closes, the primordial waters that ran through the garden, fled for the Hebrews (Psalm 114), sprang up in the desert, and flowed from Ezekiel’s temple find their rightful place nourishing our living creation: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.” The tree of life grows on both sides, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2). ●

Rachel McGuire is the pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Rochester, NY and an ICS doctoral student.



photograph: Kevin van der Laak



Perspective can now
be viewed online. See
www.icscanada.edu/perspective/

2010

What's so Critical About Faith? Exploring a Crucial Feature of Modern Life Presented by ICS Professor Ron Kuipers

Edmonton Saturday March 13, 2010 (morning)
Location TBA

Calgary Monday, March 15, 2010 (evening)
Location TBA

(part of the 2010 Christian Thought Lectures,
sponsored by the Religious Studies Department at the University of Calgary)

www.icscanada.edu/events

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Perspective is produced by:

Editorial: Sophie Vandenberg,
Bob Sweetman, Vidya Williams,
Debbie Sawczak

Writers: Michael DeMoor, Ron
Kuipers, Rachel McGuire, John
O'Leary, Janet Read, Ronnie Shuker,
Rebekah Smick, Bob Sweetman

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Perspective, ICS
229 College Street, Suite 100
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1R4

416 979 2331
1 888 326 5347
info@icscanada.edu
www.icscanada.edu

*USA subscribers/supporters
please contact:*

FRIENDS OF ICS
1937 Lockmere Dr
Kentwood MI 49508
616 560 2092
1 888 811 8667
info@friendsofics.org
www.friendsofics.org
Dr. Peter Borgdorff
Executive Director
peterborgdorff@comcast.net

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Songs of Love and Sorrow: Re-engaging the Social Ethics of Music Saturday, April 10, 2010 at the Royal Conservatory of Music

Composer Jonathan Berger will deliver the Institute for Christian Studies' 2010 *Art Talks* lecture. A panel of eminent composers, philosophers, and ethicists will comment on the relation of music, ethics, and society, and the New Music Ensemble of the Royal Conservatory of Music will perform Berger's concerto "Jiyeh." The piece expresses the theme of an ecological disaster arising out of war and makes musical reference to religious liturgies of repentance; it will be complemented by other contemporary music engaging themes of war and Holocaust.

Event sponsored by: The Royal Conservatory of Music
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